

THE epicenter

Employee Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System • Edition 3, 2007

Secretary and Governor Preside at Purple Heart Ceremony

There was standing room only. Nearly 300 people packed into the Palo Alto Auditorium to watch VA Secretary James Nicholson and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger present Purple Hearts to four soldiers who were being treated at Palo Alto Health Care System.

His prosthetic proudly displayed the Governor's signature. He said, "Can you believe it? Arnold Schwarzenegger got down on his knees to do this. I've never been so proud."

Earlier in the day, the Secretary of VA visited the hospital, stopping by to meet both patients and veterans. While on the Spinal Cord Injury Unit, he presented a patient with one of his coins. He went to the next bed and met Vietnam Veteran Tom Parkes. He shook Mr. Parkes hand and asked him how he was doing and how was his care. "Doing fine sir and the care here is great." There was a moment of quiet and Mr. Parkes said, "you can pay me now!" Not missing a beat, the Secretary said, "Here's one of my coins. That and \$4.95 will buy you a cup of coffee." Everyone in the room laughed.

(To read about the soldiers who received their Purple Hearts see page 6.)



Sgt. Paul Gregory, Sgt. Will Glass, Secretary Nicholson, SSgt. Jay Wilkerson Governor Schwarzenegger and Sgt. Brett Miller

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger pinned on the Purple Heart medals while Sgt. Lee Smith read the citation. Secretary Nicholson then presented each soldier with their certificates.

Schwarzenegger then took time to sign autographs and take pictures with the soldiers, families and staff members. At one point, a veteran who had lost his leg in Iraq asked the Governor to sign his prosthetic. The next day the veteran was wearing shorts and it was a chilly day. He gleefully stated, "I may never wear pants again. Look at this!"



The Governor signs a veteran's prosthetic leg following the ceremony.

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A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

As we head toward the end of another successful fiscal year, I hope that all of you were able to take some time off this summer to relax and refocus to face the new challenges ahead. While our challenges never end, your ability to demonstrate flexibility and creativity to meet those challenges is inspiring. We have successfully completed numerous external surveys over the past several months including the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

surveys (CARF) for both Compensated Work Therapy and Rehabilitation Inpatient and Transitional Programs, College of American Pathologists Accreditation (CAP) for our laboratories in Menlo Park, San Jose and Livermore and of course JCAHO for our entire health care system. All these visits were tremendously successful. The results are a great credit to the leadership in each of these clinical areas and to their commitment to ongoing readiness. This readiness is critical to our long term success and to our ability to fulfill our promise to veterans to be a world leader in providing exceptional health care.

We continued to strive to meet all the VHA performance measures and continue to make important breakthroughs on both the inpatient and outpatient settings in terms of access, especially for new patients but also for established patients. We are making numerous targeted interventions to improve patient satisfaction again in both the inpatient and outpatient settings. Our adherence to clinical practice guidelines remains strong. We have made fantastic strides in improving our business practices in the MCCF area. As of the writing of this column, we are approximately \$3.4M shy of our goal of \$18,257,541. In other words, our goal is definitely obtainable with two months and

three days left in our collection period. We have numerous performance improvement activities taking place throughout the clinical and administrative services.

We hosted numerous dignitary visitors both internal and external to VA. Senator Boxer's key staff made several visits to VAPAHCS this spring and Senator Feinstein personally visited the Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. Dr. Kupersmith, VHA's Chief Officer for Research and Development, spent a full day touring VAPAHCS and ended the day with a town hall meeting with investigators. The Secretary's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans spent a full week touring all aspects of VAPAHCS the first week in June. This was the same week Secretary Nicholson spent two full days at VAPAHCS touring, meeting staff and holding a private meeting with current and former OIF/OEF patients and their families. Secretary Nicholson and Governor Schwarzenegger presided over a Purple Heart ceremony for four of our patients (Will Glass, Paul Gregory, Brett Miller and Jay Wilkerson), while a standing-room only capacity crowd watched and eagerly awaited their opportunity to obtain photo opportunities and autographs from the Governor.

We have also put considerable energy into enhancing our staffing, equipment and physical environments in two key areas – Mental Health and Polytrauma. We have received significant dollars designated to support both of these programs. Multiple services are working together to put in place the people and programs (and office or clinical space) to enhance the care we provide in these areas. I am extremely grateful to numerous key contributors in both Mental Health and Polytrauma who have worked tirelessly for many months on these activities.

In closing, I want to honor the memory of three very special Polytrauma patients, A.P. Apineru, Eric Dismang and Frank Sandoval. All three men touched our lives and our hearts. It was our honor to serve you as it is to serve all of our patients. God bless you and your families.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman
Director**

VAPAHCS Gets Gold Seal of Approval From Joint Commission

Congratulations to everyone at VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) on receiving accreditation from the Joint Commission. By demonstrating compliance with the national standards for health care quality and safety, VAPAHCS has earned the Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval for Behavioral Health Care, Home Care, Hospital Care, and Long Term Care.

"I am extremely proud of all our employees for our results in this, our first unannounced Joint Commission Survey," said Lisa Freeman, VAPAHCS Director. "Achieving full accreditation in every one of our programs is a testament to their commitment to excellence in the care they provide each and every day."

In March, the Joint Commission conducted an unannounced, on-site evaluation of VAPAHCS. The accreditation award recognizes VAPAHCS' dedication to complying with the Joint

Commission's state-of-the-art standards on a continuous basis. This unannounced survey is a validation of your hospital's continuous improvement efforts.



The Joint Commission's website www.qualitycheck.org provides descriptive and performance information about our accreditation. Within this site you can view a Quality Report which contains information regarding our accreditation status, our compliance with National Patient Safety Goals, and performance measurement results.

In becoming accredited, VAPAHCS was evaluated against a set of national standards. In comparison with other Joint Commission accredited organizations, the VA Palo Alto achieved all our performance goals equal to or above other accredited hospitals.

VA and DOD Sign MOU for First Joint Ambulatory Care Center

VAPAHCS and the Department of the Army have signed a Memorandum of Understanding at Monterey that began the steps to create the first ever Ambulatory Care Center that would serve both active duty service members and veterans.

This project came about after both the VA and the Defense Language Institute outgrew their existing clinics. The site of the current Monterey Outpatient Clinic is land locked by California State University – Monterey Bay property and therefore has no further room to expand. To that end, both organizations, VA and DoD, expressed interest in exploring innovative approaches to delivering health care for the 77,300 eligible beneficiaries who live in the Monterey/Santa Cruz service area. The solution is for the VA and DoD to collaborate in delivering health care to this region.

The MOU expresses the intent of the Department of the Army to lease a land parcel to the Department of Veterans Affairs at no cost for the construction of a modern, state-of-the-art Ambulatory Care Center. The land parcel selected for development is less than a mile away from the existing VA Monterey Outpatient Clinic. The new site offers increased accessibility and is located close to the Post Exchange and Commissary, two services enjoyed by veterans.

Future steps in the development of the new Ambulatory Care Center include a feasibility study to determine the health care needs of the VA and DoD, and obtaining the necessary construction funding from the VA. The existing Monterey Outpatient Clinic will remain

fully operational throughout the study and construction phases of the new Ambulatory Care Center. Both VAPAHCS and the Department of the Army are committed to providing the best health care and the best work environment to their patients and staff.



On Wednesday July 25th Colonel Pamela Martis, Garrison Commander, Presidio of Monterey and Lisa Freeman, Director of VA Palo Alto Health Care System, signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding. The Memorandum of Understanding expresses the intent of both organizations to move forward in creating a joint VA/DoD Ambulatory Care Center.

VA Palo Alto Hosts National Symposium on Heart Failure and Transplantation

The Heart Failure and Transplant Program at the Palo Alto VA recently hosted a national symposium on "Advances in Heart Failure Management and Cardiac Transplantation." The conference, held on June 22-23, 2007 in San Francisco, attracted over 150 health care providers from 14 states.

Program participants included physicians, dentists, physicians assistants, advanced practice nurses, registered nurses, social workers, and other allied health professionals involved in the care of heart failure and transplant patients.

The program faculty included speakers from the VAPAHCS, Stanford University, and the VA National Transplant Program. The Friday program began with an overview of heart failure therapy by Sharon Hunt, MD, FACC, Chair of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association writing committee that was responsible for developing the 2005 ACC/AHA Chronic Heart Failure Guidelines.

The day ended with a perspective on the current status of VA heart failure care by Robert Jesse, MD, PhD, National Director of Cardiology. Ralph DePalma, MD, National Director of Surgery and Transplantation, kicked off the Saturday program with a historical overview of transplantation within the VA system. The remainder of the lectures focused on the management of the heart failure and transplant patient, highlighting the interplay between drugs, medical devices, surgery, and mechanical circulatory support.

"This conference provided a much needed forum for VA providers to learn more about the management of these complex patients, to interact with representatives from the VA heart transplant centers, and to meet each other face-to-face," commented Michael Pham, MD, Chair of the symposium and Medical



Chuck Revell

Director of the Heart Failure/Transplant Program at the Palo Alto VA. Dr. Pham emphasized the importance of early referrals of patients with advanced heart failure as the use of newer drugs, implantable devices, and bypass/valve surgery can often improve survival, increase quality of life, and avert or delay the need for transplantation.

Since 1995, organ transplant services within the VA have been provided through a centralized process coordinated by the VA National Transplant Program in Washington DC. The Palo Alto VA is one of five VA medical centers nationwide that offers advanced heart failure care and transplant services for veterans with end-stage heart failure.

Representative quotes from conference attendees:

"Thank you for an excellent conference. It was personally and professionally beneficial to me."

– Kathleen Zalecki, LCSW (San Francisco VA)

"Heart Failure focus and VA focus is a wonderful idea. I would like to see this annually."

– Denise Fuller, ARNP (Bay Pines VAMC, Florida)

"Just excellent. Please expand if you can, especially enjoyed the multidisciplinary presentations. I feel more in touch with VA colleagues."

– Lee Ann Hawkins, NP (Loma Linda VA)

"Excellent speakers. Excellent class. Extremely informative and filled in a lot for follow-up meds and care of post op [heart transplant patients]"

– Diana Hygelund, RN (Palo Alto, CA)

"Thanks to all involved who made the program successful. Lots of 'behind the scenes' work to ensure attendees have an outstanding program. Hope to see it repeated"

– Brenda Salvas, Transplant Manager (Washington, DC)



Chuck Revell

Meyers Has Been at the Bottom and Now Reaches Out to Pull Others Up

By Kerri Childress

Five days a week William Meyers leaves his EMS job at the Palo Alto hospital and heads to a homeless shelter in San Jose. No, it's not where he is living. It's where he finds value in life.

A big man, heavily tattooed, Meyers is a Vet-to-Vet Peer Counselor; a vocation he fell into after years of drugs, gangs and even prison.

"I've been at the bottom, believe me," said Meyers. "I know what it's like to have no hope, not to care about anything, especially myself. It's a bad place to be."

After one stint in prison for a drive-by shooting, Meyers was about to head back to jail when his parole officer told him that if he went to the VA for help, they would hold off on jail. He readily accepted the offer.

For the next 21 months, Meyers went through VAPAHCS' 1st Step Program, Homeless Veterans Rehabilitation Program (HVRP) and Compensated Work Therapy (CWT). For the past six and half years he's been working for VA and looking for any way to give back to a system that, he says, "saved my life."

"I first met Bill at HVRP in 2001," said Keith Harris, Chief of Domiciliary Service. "He held a resident leadership position at the time, which meant that he was responsible for running the community meeting. I was so impressed - here was this veteran receiving treatment for homelessness and other issues, and he was competently leading a meeting of 40+ veterans and staff members. Some of it was his VA training and some was just Bill's natural way of being, and he has maintained that demeanor through the years."

Meyers served on the USS Enterprise and got out of the Navy in 1987. He says he started a downhill spiral right away, getting involved with gangs and a revolving door at the jail. What really turned his world upside down was when a dozen police officers bound and handcuffed him at a grocery store in front of his four-year-old son.

"I knew I had to do something. My son is everything to me." Today, he sees his 12-year-old son, William (Andy) Meyers, weekly and carries a photograph in his wallet that he proudly shows and tells folks, "He's top in his class. He's going to go far. And he's proud of me now, too."

Another person who's proud of Meyers and devoted to him as a friend is Perry Myrick, custodial manager for the Fisher House, who was an infantryman in the Army from 1981-1984. Like Meyers, Myrick went through 1st Step, HVRP and CWT.

But Myrick's motivation wasn't family, it was Meyers.

"Perry was holed up in a room drinking. For more than a week I would take him food everyday and sit with him and talk to him about getting help. I just couldn't stand to see a really good man sinking like this," said Meyers. "I can't tell you how proud I am of him now. So proud." Myrick throws the praise back to Meyers: "He's my friend, he has come a long way and pulled me with him."

As if working at VA and the homeless shelter five days a week wasn't enough, Meyers also counsels 12 residents at the "Day by Day Residential Living," home in San Jose. Called a Sober Living Environment (SLE), Meyers is responsible for the residents' well-being and group counseling sessions.

"I live at the home and have for two years. In virtually all aspects of my life I'm around recovering substance abusers - it's honestly what keeps me clean. It is also what gives me purpose. Instead of taking life, I'm giving life back - there is meaning now, where there never was before."



Chuck Revell

William Meyers meets with his friend Perry Myrick outside the Fisher House where Myrick works. Both men were homeless and went through VA's extensive rehabilitation programs. Both will tell you now that it was a long, hard haul, but worth every minute of struggle.



William Meyers (center, back row) joins his group of veterans that he counsels five days a week at a homeless shelter in San Jose. "In virtually all aspects of my life I'm around recovering substance abusers - it's honestly what keeps me clean. It is also what gives me purpose."

(Continued from page 1)

Purple Heart Ceremony

The four soldiers who received their Purple Hearts were:

Army Sgt. William Glass, 23, Bravo Co., 1-66 4th ID. Sgt. Glass was on his second tour in Iraq and was put on “stop-loss” when it was time for him to return home. On Aug. 18, 2006, he was on patrol in Taji (eight miles north of Baghdad) when an IED exploded sending shrapnel all over his body, including his head. He has lost an eye and has just had major surgery on his right arm and hand. He also is being treated for traumatic brain injury.

Army Sgt. Paul Gregory, 26, C Battery, 4-27 Field Artillery. Sgt. Gregory was on his second tour in Iraq, one month short of coming home, when a car bomb exploded in Baghdad on Sept. 14, 2006. The bomb left him with multiple injuries, including traumatic brain injury.

National Guardsman Sgt. Brett Miller, 31, was in a Humvee on an Iraqi highway between Kirkuk and Mosel, when a bomb went off six feet from his door on Aug. 11, 2005. It left him blind and deaf on his right side, weak on his left side and with his right knee damaged. More than a year after his injury, in September 2006, he came to the VA Palo Alto hospital for what had been an undiagnosed brain injury and the PTSD residential program.

Army Staff Sergeant Jay Wilkerson, a 19-year Army soldier, was assigned to a Multi-National Security Task Force when two rocket propelled grenades exploded in his Humvee outside Fullujah, on March 28, 2006. SSgt. Wilkerson’s best friend, Robert Hernandez, was killed. For his heroic actions at this time, he also was awarded a Bronze Star. SSgt. Wilkerson had originally received his Purple Heart while in a coma at Walter Reed and asked if he could have it presented while he was awake.



Chuck Revell

Following the Purple Heart Ceremony, the Governor visited with staff on the traumatic brain injury unit.



Curt Campbell

Governor pins the Purple Heart on Sgt. Gregory and meets Mrs. Gregory below.



Curt Campbell

Secretary Nicholson and Governor Schwarzenegger congratulate SSgt. Jay Wilkerson, who received his Purple Heart at Walter Reed the first time, but was in a coma at the time and asked if he could receive it again – this time awake!



Curt Campbell

Pictures That Say Freedom

*Rainbow:
this shot was
snapped during
field maneuvers
in southern
Texas while
training for
Iraq. It had just
stopped raining
enough to shoot
the shot.*



Sgt. Brett Miller, one of the soldiers who received his Purple Heart, always knew what he wanted to do since watching his family's home burn at age 14. With a master's degree in wild-land fire science, Miller taught college courses in firefighting during the winter and battled blazes for the U.S. Forest Service in the summer. He led an elite 20-person "Hot Shot" crew into often-perilous fire situations. Miller, who joined the National Guard in 1998, found more danger in Northern Iraq.

Sgt. Brett Miller, 31, suffered a traumatic brain injury nearly two years ago in Iraq when a roadside bomb exploded next to his Humvee. The blast cost him the sight in his right eye, hearing in his right ear and half the strength on his left side, and it left Miller with a memory so poor that he can not recall much of recent events

Miller is in a different place now. He may never return to the fast-paced work of fighting fires, but he is now getting his adrenaline rush on narrow dirt trails with steep descents, hairpin turns and unexpected bumps. The extreme sport of downhill mountain biking is his latest pursuit. Miller recently competed in the National Sea Otter Classic in Monterey, California.

Miller is also interested in photography and plans to take digital and film photography classes and perhaps find work in a related field. The following are some pictures and captions that Brett created to express his idea of freedom:



*Since space was a
commodity with several
hundred soldiers sharing
cramped quarters, Ken
Shaver of Bend Oregon
was able to fit into his foot
locker to read his letter
from home without being
disturbed.*



*Flags over uniforms: This shot was taken while
fueling up in Germany before getting back on the
plane for the last leg into Iraq. Even though we
were in Germany the flags were still meaningful.*



*This is the last moment our feet were to be on
American soil before our 27 hour flight to the Middle
East. We were sent off by the Governor of Idaho*



*Flag in plane: No matter where you went on
an aircraft with a flag it was a notification that
there was a fallen brother flying home with you.
That to me meant freedom.*

Hippotherapy for our Polytrauma Patients

Our VA Palo Alto Polytrauma System of Care, along with the National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy (NCEFT) located in Woodside, will supplement our rehabilitation services for our active duty soldiers and veterans. These services will include individual physical and occupational therapy, incorporating hippotherapy and equine assisted therapy.

At a recent dedication ceremony, the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund provided a generous donation for this program of a "Surehands Lift" in memory of Staff Sgt. "AP" Apineru, USMC. Members of "AP's" family and many fellow marines along with over 83 guests attended the ceremony, which was also covered by a crew from KTVU.

On twice weekly visits, Polytrauma Transitional Rehabilitation Program (PTRP) staff including Paul Johnson, RN, Smita Shukla, OTR/L, Susan Feighery, TRS, Kayla Forster, TRS, and Jill Storms, OTR/L, have taken patients to the Woodside NCEFT. So far, patients Angel Gomez, Alfredo Capps, James Hancock, Travis Gonder, Chris Bollinger, and Will Glass have been there. Paul Johnson, Co-director, Polytrauma Transition Program, states that "I was contacted by Lori Garone from the NCEFT late last year. I had not heard about Hippotherapy, but soon learned of its benefits and realized the value of being able to offer it to our patients."



NCEFT staff and volunteer leading Angel Gomez on a therapy horse.

What is Hippotherapy?

Unlike therapeutic riding, which teaches people with special needs how to ride, hippotherapy (the name derives from the Greek word for "horse") focuses purely on the repetitive motion of the horse's walk, which mimics an average person's gait. Specially trained physical and occupational therapists use this rehabilitation treatment for clients who have movement, cognitive and social dysfunction.

Why the Horse?

The horse's walk provides sensory input through movement which is variable, rhythmic and repetitive. The resultant movement responses in the patient are similar to human movement patterns of the pelvis while walking. Clients respond enthusiastically to this enjoyable learning experience in a natural setting. The physical benefits of equestrian therapy are the result of the rider's response to the horse's movements. Physically, hippotherapy can improve balance, muscle tone, posture, mobility and function.

Therapeutic Riding for Soldiers is Nothing New

The ancient Greeks put injured warriors on horseback to improve their health and well being. The English used therapeutic riding as a part of their rehabilitation program for injured soldiers during World War I.



NCEFT staff and volunteer bringing therapy horse to Alfredo Capps.



Bill Ulibarri, VAPAHCS contracting officer, and his band (Kenny Chavez on flute and Gary Harang on congas) christen the VAPA Arts' inaugural performance with wonderful lunchtime entertainment in the Palo Alto Canteen. VAPA Arts is a project headed up by Jeff Perez, human resources specialist. VAPA Art's goal is to form a committee of VAPAHCS employees with artistic talents and show case them for our Veteran community -- and what a great kick-off.



EMPLOYEE NEWS

Employee Service Awards

Retirees

10 Years

Ambulatory Care

Richard Stello

Anesthesiology

Kevin Fish
Margaret Fish
Eran Geller
Charles Goss
Audrey Shafer

Business Office

Ronald Boran

Canteen

Ria Briones

Director's Office

Jason Nietupski

Domiciliary Care

Leroy Edwards

Engineering

Wilfredo Fernando

Environmental Mgmt

Roseann Nothstein
Michael Sewell

Medical

Paul Heidenreich
Denley Jang
David Li

Nursing LTC

Adelina Dulos
Shari Marcotte
Norma Ramirez
Richard Rossell
Katrina Souttaphonh

Nursing M/S

Dinah Jarata

Nursing MH

Amy Johnson-Wilson

Nutrition & Food

Kenneth Carey
Herman Stribling
Helen Walley

Police

Elliot Carter
Terry Stowe

Pharmacy

Leslie Sanders

Physical Medicine & Rehab

Kevin Ochs

Psychiatry

Joyce Dunston
Kalpana Nathan

Research

Robert Smith

Surgical

Jack Bois

Social Work

Lori Birch-Buelna
Kathryn Sherrill

15 Years

Anesthesiology

Juliana Barr
Leslie Olson

Business Office

Terri Parham-Evola

Canteen

Amelita Briones

Director's Office

Jan Plona

Medical (Extended Care)

Susan Frayne
Deanna Maples

Neurology

Thomas Yee

Nursing AC

Jennifer Norcia

Nursing LTC

Renato Alambat
Cecilia Daguio
Ann Dudley
Jesusa Magbanua
Evelyn Malate
Linda Pries
Cynthia Wilkinson

Nursing M/S

Marilou Anderson
Andrew Freedman
Flerida Tomboc

Nursing MH

Orendaine Go-Acidera
Donna Ingmire
Pompa Malakar
Carolyn McDuffey
Richard Mullen
Nursing Rehab.
Zenaida Puyaoan
Dorothy Usi

Nutrition & Food

Gregory Brooks

Pathology & Lab.

Thomas Clemes

Pharmacy

Douglas Ha
Koon Louie
Kelly Robertson

Physical Medicine & Rehab.

Christina Hays

Prosthetics & Sensory Aids

Kathleen Williams

Radiology

John Kodis
David Van Syckle

Recreation

Alisa Krinsky

Research

Theodore Jacob

Surgical

Jennine Kirby

20 Years

A&MMS

Isabel Arroyo
Angelito Millan

Business Office

Peggy Hefter

Director's Office

Charles Revell
Eugene Schacht

Dental

Rose Encina

Engineering

Roger Ballesteros
Willie Davis
Morten Green
Perry Leanna
Thomas Lettiere
Kenneth Marquardt
Mousa Jasser

Environmental Mgmt.

Robert Jones

Fiscal

Houli Kham Lim

IRM

Mohamad Ghamrawi
Melvin Goodwin
Jesus Ortega

Nursing AC

Myrna Horton
Wilma Inciong
Cynthia Santos

Nursing LTC

Clemencio Cerezo
Norma Basa
Belinda Fajardo
Sherri Gipson

Nursing MH

Marilyn Hartman-Lane
Tanyle Herring
Rosita Lopez
Gail Miller
Ollie Robinson

Medical (Extended Care)

James Hallenbeck
Marion Jean Hogan

Nursing M/S

Linda Iyama
Virginia Ulanimo

Nutrition & Food

Billy Lacy

Pathology & Lab.

Bruce Haggerty

Pharmacy

Nancy Granzella

Psychiatry

Karen Larsen
Sharon Williams

Radiology

Paul Brandon

Social Work

Pamela Courtright
Suzanne Cottle
John Aboytes

Voluntary

Vickie Baker

25 Years

A&MMS

Michael Berwick

Business Office

Debbie McCormick

Chief of Staff

Merryl Young

Engineering

William Hicok
Rolando Jara
Stylianios Trigonis

Human Resources

Maxine Kennedy

Nursing AC

Kim Bowlby
Rosario Callejas
Teresita Delrosario

Nursing MH

Jesse Mesa

Nursing M/S

Napoleon Advincula
Violeta Tangalin

Pathology & Lab.

Deadra MacArthur

Psychiatry

Harold Smith
Joy Taylor

Psychology

Charlotte Giese
Dana Iller

Research

Doris Tyrrell

30 Years

Domiciliary Care

Donna Horn

Nursing LTC

Raymundo Tanjoco
J. Dwight Wilson

Nursing M/S

Corazon Gosom

Nursing Rehab

Faaiutausaga Mauga

Nutrition & Food

Ampora Khorana

Pathology & Lab.

Rodrigo Cifriano

Research

Sonne Lemke

Surgical

Gunars Bite

35 Years

Engineering

Phillip Farber
Paul Marino

Nursing AC

Sandra Parkes

Nutrition & Food

Mark Blackburn

Pathology & Lab.

Carolyn Barnes
Barbara Egbert
Arundhati Perakash

Pharmacy

Epolito Burciaga

Surgical

Inder Perakash

40 Years

Anesthesiology

Bruce Tornoe

Nursing LTC

Christine Van-Ness

50 Years

Fiscal

Robert Kato

A&MMS

Batzer, Gordon (38)
Bataer, Janice (31)
Meusel, Patrick (15)
Humphrey, Ken (30)

Anesthesiology

Fish, Margaret (Pam) (10)

Canteen

Mene, Julia (5)
Puyaoan, Cecelia (16)
Puyaoan, Rudolfo (12)

Chief of Staff

Thomas, Linda (18)
Viray, Leonor (22)

Dental

Pierce, Paulette (20)

Domaiciliary

Knips, Joan (14)

EMS

Grehan, James (27)

Engineering

Kruize, Michael (37)
Leanna, Perry (17)
Michelson, Robert (27)
Yee, Alan (31)

IRMS

Okamoto, Ken (42)

Medical

Love, Rutha (21)

Nursing

Jones, Dorothy (28)
Mark, Sabrina (5)
McDuffey, Carolyn (14)
Orias, Cresencia (17)
Reddy, Sarojamma (7)
Romby, James (12)
Sommer, Noreen (31)
Stagin, Maxima (24)

Nutrition & Food

Mastracchio, Elizabeth (37)
Smith, Barbara (30)

Psychiatry

Gusman, Fred (38)

Psychology

Brockhoff, Lois (44)
Welch, Renate (22)

Readjment Counseling

Amador, Rosendo (18)
Kim, Yuen (15)

Social Work

Bass, Susan (18)
Grace, Gloria (35)
Johnson, Faye (17)

AAHRPP Accredits VA Palo Alto Health Care System

The Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc. (AAHRPP) recently announced the accreditation of the VAPAHCS, one of only five VA facilities to receive such an honor.

"This is a very exciting time for these organizations and for AAHRPP," said Marjorie A. Speers, Ph.D., executive director, AAHRPP. "Not only is it a significant achievement for these institutions, but accreditation is critical for the public's trust in research."

Through the intensive accreditation process, VAPAHCS demonstrated that extensive safeguards were built into every level

of the research operation. AAHRPP standards exceed federal regulation in several ways. For example, AAHRPP requires protections, such as conflict of interest rules and community education. The rigorous accreditation process often results in system-wide improvements that provide greater protection for research participants and ensure the integrity of the research. Accreditation is valid for three years.

VAPAHCS joins 68 organizations across the country which are accredited. AAHRPP is currently working with nearly 400 organizations that are in the accreditation process.

For more about AAHRPP accreditation, visit www.aahrpp.org.



HealthierUS Veterans

by Katelin Campbell, MHA, Health System Specialist

VA and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched the HealthierUS Veterans Initiative to help combat the growing epidemics of obesity and diabetes. The focus is to help America's veterans, their families and communities improve their health and adopt healthy lifestyles by eating healthy and being active.

In September 2006, VAPAHCS established the HealthierUS Veterans (HUSV) Committee, consisting of a multi-disciplinary team of clinicians and administrative staff who are dedicated to improving the health and wellness of veterans, staff, and the community. The goal of the VAPAHCS HealthierUS Veterans Committee is to develop and promote local health and wellness initiatives, in conjunction with national programming, that encourage and enable veterans, their families, VA employees, and the surrounding communities to make healthy eating choices and increase physical activity.

One of the initiatives is the development of a Wellness and Community Resource Guide. The guide is a comprehensive tool designed to serve as a basic guide to nutrition and physical activity that contains a list of community resources with fitness opportunities that could be used by any veteran, VA employee or member of the community. The guide is available in hard copy from the patient education depository or online at the newly created "Salute Your Health" webpage <http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/SaluteYourHealth.asp>. The website also contains healthy tips and other wellness resources. The committee, along with Recreation Therapy, coordinated the May 16th National Employee Fitness Day event at each division. Activities included a walk, health snacks, and a raffle for an Ipod Nano.

If you are interested in participating on the HUSV Committee, or have an idea about how to further health and wellness at our organization, please contact Katelin Campbell at Katelin.Campbell@va.gov.



Employees celebrate National Employee Fitness Day on May 16th during a noon-time walk around the Palo Alto Division

Chuck Revell

VAPAHCS Identified as a Top Performing All Employee Survey Facility

This past spring, a VHA All Employee Survey was administered to employees across the country. Nearly 62% (56% in 2006) of VAPAHCS' 3,339 employees responded with employee satisfaction scores consistently higher than the average scores from VISN 21 and VHA nationwide.

According to the survey administrators, "The VA Palo Alto Health Care System was identified as a top performing facility."

"Employee perceptions and satisfaction with their work environment are key to providing exceptional health care to America's veterans and identifying ways to improve VA," said Director Lisa Freeman. "I take these surveys very seriously and use them to find ways to constantly improve the working environment throughout our health care system."

Beginning in 1997, VHA conducted an All Employee Survey, which was repeated in 2001 and 2004. In 2006 and 2007, VHA surveyed employees again, using an improved, shorter survey instrument. Then, VHA asked the VISNs to complete an analysis of the survey results and develop an action plan, which is now a VHA performance measure. Based on the survey findings, any corrective actions taken should lead to an improved work environment.

The Job Satisfaction questions measured individual satisfaction; the Organizational Assessment questions measured satisfaction at the work-group level and satisfaction with a number of practices; and the Culture questions measured satisfaction with broad organization issues.

Job Satisfaction Index

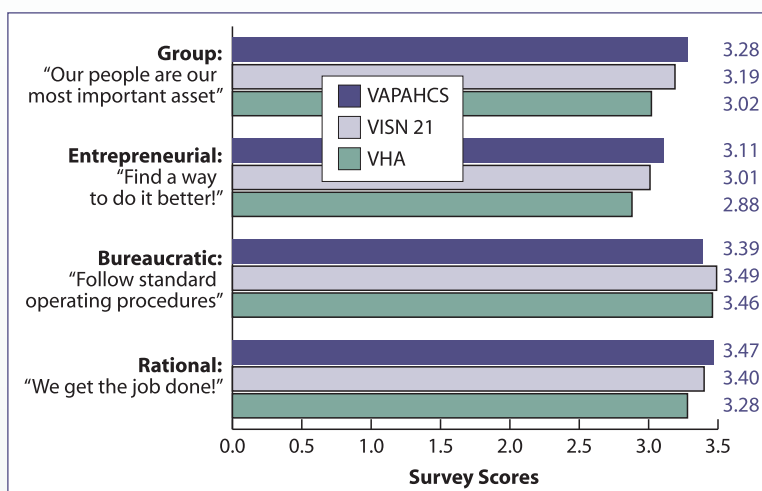
Of the 11 Job Satisfaction Index factors, VAPAHCS had 10 that were higher than VHA and all 11 were higher than VISN 21. These job satisfaction scores are very important because higher scores lead to lower sick leave rates, fewer EEO complaints, and greater civility among coworkers. Also, they lead to better patient satisfaction and higher Joint Commission scores.

Organizational Assessment Inventory (OAI) Scale

Of the 20 Organizational Assessment factors, 19 were consistently above VHA and VISN 21 average scores. In previous research by the AES team, higher OAI scores were correlated with lower sick leave rates, fewer lost time claims and fewer EEO claims. They also lead to higher quality of chronic disease care and preventive care.

Measuring Organization Culture

Employees were asked to rank each type of culture (Bureaucratic, Entrepreneurial, Group and Rational) as they felt it applied to their work environment. Palo Alto scores were higher than VHA and VISN21 on all four cultures.



Why Care About the Culture Results?

Culture differences are important as they relate employee and patient satisfaction. For example, a one point difference in combined group and entrepreneurial culture associated with 4.3% lower turnover among physicians. Knowledge of culture can be used to customize intervention strategies to be more effective.

"Superficial information only gives us an overview of the survey. However, in drilling down to services and analyzing and interpreting the results of the survey, we hope to be able to increase workforce productivity and effectiveness, increase and enhance recruitment and retention, and in turn impact such various outcomes as inpatient satisfaction, and lowered EEO cases," explained Freeman.

"I appreciate everyone who took the time to fill out the survey," said Freeman. "The result of these activities will impact work systems, employee education and development, and employee well-being and satisfaction. It is important that activities such as this become a crucial dimension of the management of organizational culture and in turn an integral piece of VHA culture."

Using the AES data, one can perform various stratifications or "breakdowns" of the scores. This can help to precisely identify areas of excellence and opportunities for improvement.

- Are your dimension scores consistent across different types of employees or workgroups, or...
- Do the various types of employees or workgroups at your facility differ in their level of satisfaction?
- How do other facilities of your level of complexity score on a given dimension?

Our next steps will be the dissemination of these results, development of goals, further development of action plans, and follow-up utilizing performance measures.

Volunteers Spend July 4th Helping Others Remain Independent

For more than 20 years, Ruth Chandler, 87, has been giving her time, her smile and her friendship to others as a volunteer at the VAPAHCS. Now it was time for a little pay back and Michael Armijo, also a VA volunteer, knew just how to do that.

Armijo gathered nearly 40 people on July 4th to celebrate Independence Day with a typical American barbeque. But this one was different. The hotdogs and hamburgers were served after about four hours of hard work painting Chandler's three-bedroom house and surrounding fence.

"Ruth is what America is all about. She's the wife of a WWII Navy veteran, a mother and a friend to many of America's veterans," said Armijo. "Painting her house is the least we can do."

Chandler talked about her life and the last 50 years she had been living in Santa Clara. "I raised my kids here from the time they were babies. Real different from the way I grew up. We pretty much moved every time the rent was due," she said with a sigh. "It was during the depression and money was real scarce."

Chandler was surprised and very pleased to see so many people came to help. "My husband used to do all this type of work and keep up the fruit trees, but he passed away in 1991. It's been 25 years since the house was painted and it looks wonderful now."

And it wasn't just volunteers from VAPAHCS that helped. Also on hand were Chandler's two daughters, son, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. Volunteers from the Salvation Army, where Chandler also donates time, were there, too.

"I would attribute volunteering to keeping me alert and active," she said to a reporter who was there that day. "If I stayed home and did nothing, I would not be around right now."



Ruth Chandler stops at her kitchen door to thank friends, Virginia Hargett and Michael Armijo (both also volunteers at the VAPAHCS).



Top left: Mike Armijo was the main person to coordinate the painting event for Ruth Chandler. A VA volunteer himself, Armijo wants to do something like this every July 4th.

Bottom left: Vickie Baker, voluntary service, not only volunteered her 4th of July, but brought along her daughters, too. More than 40 people worked in the heat and sunshine to paint Chandler's house.

Left: Nearly 40 volunteers from VA, Salvation Army and Ruth's family members help to paint her house and fence on July 4th.

National Occupational Therapy Month



Curt Campbell

The practice of occupational therapy (OT) is based upon the belief that occupations, which are the activities in which we engage that make up the substance of our lives, are a primary influence on health and well-being. Working to rehabilitate our veterans since World War I, and embracing the idea that “You are what you do”, occupational therapy might be best understood as the “doing” therapy.

OTs assess, utilize, and adapt everyday activities to improve function,

enhance performance, promote health, prevent illness, and increase independence in those persons to whom they provide services. OTs work in a range of settings including hospitals, outpatient services, skilled nursing facilities, mental health facilities, community centers, independent living centers, workplaces, schools, and individuals’ homes.

The 25 registered occupational therapists at VAPAHCS work in a variety of settings including neuro-rehabilitation, spinal cord

injury, polytrauma, hand therapy, hospice, home care, acute care, long-term care, gero-psychiatry, outpatient services, research, computer assistive technology, employee workstation ergonomics. These therapists strive to help our veterans master the “skills for the job of living”. For more information about occupational therapy, please visit the America Occupational Therapy Association website at www.aota.org or speak with one of the OTs here at the VA.

The Occupational Therapy Department celebrated OT month by hosting a booth in the front lobby April 25 with craft activities, games (complete with prizes), and an ergonomic work station set-up. Thanks to everyone who stopped by and participated.



Curt Campbell

VAPAHCS Again Recognized for IT Efforts

VA Palo Alto Health Care System once again made the list of the nation’s 100 “Most Wired” hospitals and health systems. The list is compiled by Hospitals & Health Networks magazine, a publication of the American Hospital Association. The magazine looks at how hospitals use information technology in areas such as safety, quality, customer service and their work forces.

Experts from throughout the public and private sectors advocate greater use of information technology in health care. This year’s list marked the fourth time VA Palo Alto has made the cut.

“We are fortunate to have staff who readily embrace change and actively seek cutting edge technologies to enhance our health care delivery,” said Lisa Freeman, VAPAHCS director. “We know automation and technology dramatically improve our ability to provide safe, effective and efficient care to our veterans. It allows doctors and nurses to respond more rapidly to the needs of patients.”

Cancer Support Group Welcomes You!

Join Us

at the VA Palo Alto Division
Building 101, 2nd Floor
Library Conference Room

Every Third Tuesday of Each Month

11:30 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.

Veterans, Non-Vets and Spouses Welcome!

For Additional Information Call:

Cancer Registry
650 852-3223

3801 Miranda Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94304-1290

Tim Verceles, DDS, Receives his Mastership Award



The Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) recently awarded VA Palo Alto Health Care System's Tim Verceles, DDS, with the Mastership Award, one of the most rigorous continuing dental education awards offered today. He recently received this prestigious honor during the AGD's Annual Meeting and Exhibits held in San Diego, CA.

Over the past 44 years, 2,200 dentists worldwide completed 1,100 hours of coursework in the 16 areas of dentistry to receive the

Mastership Award from the AGD, a professional association of more than 35,000 general dentists dedicated to staying up-to-date in the profession through continuing education. This achievement marks a milestone in Dr. Verceles' career, because the award demonstrates long-term commitment to go above and beyond continuing education requirements to provide patients with the most up-to-date treatment options and superior patient care.

In addition, Dr. Verceles was one of 12 dentists selected from a national applicant pool to participate in the American Dental Association's Diversity in Leadership Program. This program is sponsored by the ADA and is taught by faculty from the Kellogg School of Business at Northwestern University.

The Meaning of Freedom

By Harriet Straus, Nurse Manager, TBI Unit

Freedom is the ability to make choices. I had the freedom to voluntarily join the United States Army Nurse Corps during the Vietnam War. That choice became the heart for who I am today. The vision of young men my age badly scarred from injuries and addiction profoundly influenced me to become a life long advocate for returning as much independence possible to wounded warriors, both military and civilian.

Today I have come full circle in my nursing career as a nurse manager and as a certified rehabilitation registered nurse for the Polytrauma Rehabilitation Unit. I am collaborating with the other Polytrauma Units within VA to help lead the way in caring for our wounded warriors from Iraq and Afghanistan.

One of those soldiers is 20-year-old, Marine Lance Corporal Angel Gomez, who fought for this country as a Mexican citizen. His journey back from his grave injuries is an inspiration to me and all my fellow workers. Angel put his life on the line for a nation that at the time would not even allow him to vote. In this photo, paralyzed on the right side and wearing a helmet to protect his damaged brain, he raises his left hand and swears allegiance to a nation he proudly now calls home.

I am also the proud parent of an active duty Army Medical Corps intensive care physician, who graduated from United States Military Academy at West Point and from the Uniformed Services Health Science University in Bethesda, Maryland. I have the freedom to "see" and to participate in the whole continuum of our military and have become my vision of the "warrior's advocate," continuously improving the care of our soldiers with experience, skill and most importantly, compassion.



Curt Campbell

Versant RN Residency Program Graduates First 15 Nurse Residents

On Aug. 3, the First Versant RN Residency Recognition and Awards Ceremony was held at the VAPAHCS. Director Lisa Freeman and Chief Nurse Executive Alice Naqvi presented the certificates of completion to 15 residents. Pinning ceremony was done by the resident's sponsor (family member or nurse manager). Larissa Africa, Senior Implementation Director of Versant was also at hand to grace the event. A slide show which captured the residents' experiences of the program was presented.

The Versant RN Residency program came about in an effort to address the current nursing shortage and replace nurses who are eligible to retire soon. As the first VA to use this program, we lead the way in recruiting new graduate nurses using a comprehensive and evidence based training designed to successfully transition a new RN from a school setting to become a nurse professional.

During the 18-week-course, residents enhance and supplement their theoretical and clinical skills, emphasizing critical thinking skills through case studies. Additionally, components of the program such as mentorship, preceptorship and debriefing sessions provide the residents with a nurturing and supportive environment.



Chuck Revell

Fifteen RN residents started on April 2 and all 15 residents completed the program. The residents were placed in different units at the Palo Alto and Livermore Divisions and visited other facilities such as the Menlo Park Division, San Jose and Monterey Clinics. Plans are underway to start the second cohort on September 17, 2007. More than 80 new graduate RNs applied to the program. Twenty RN residents are expected to participate.

VAPAHCS Designated a “War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center”

Combat veterans suffering from debilitating, chronic and ill-defined illnesses are a significant concern for VA, veterans and their families. VA's experience treating veterans from the 1991 Gulf War and the Vietnam War illustrated the need to develop new specialized health services for all combat veterans who suffer from debilitating symptoms that remain unexplained after thorough medical examinations by their local VA Medical Centers.

Called War-Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISC), these centers came as a response to an increasing caseload of war-related health issues. They improve geographic accessibility, increase collaboration on emerging combat veteran health issues and provide enhanced specialized clinical services to younger combat veterans.

The VA Palo Alto Health Care System was recently designated one of three WRIISCs, the other two being on the east coast.

Today, VA's two WRIISCs on the east coast and soon to be WRIISC in Palo Alto are providing in-depth clinical care and evaluation to combat veterans with difficult-to-diagnose illnesses from all across the country, and from all combat eras. They have seen veterans from World War II, and most recently, veterans from OIF and OEF. They are also charged with conducting research to develop better diagnoses and better treatments for difficult-to-diagnose illnesses. They also provide clinical education for VA and other health care providers on these health issues, and appropriate risk communication and outreach tools for talking to patients and families who have health concerns related to deployment environmental exposures.

You Make a Difference!

Submitted by staff, our veterans and their families

Employee to Employee

I wanted to write a brief note of thanks and appreciation for the work that Wilthie Celestine did with the Dom while meals were served here. She garnered a great deal of praise over the course of her association with us, and the residents even put together a special farewell in her honor. Positive feedback from staff included some of the following comments:

"She spent extra time running down our guys to make sure they got their trays."

"She made sure lists were generated by us when we had special events so guys wouldn't have trays when they weren't going to be at meals."

"She was on first name basis with everyone and when there was a problem she communicated with staff in trying to fix the problem."

"She went beyond just delivering the meals to us."

"What I like about her was her attention to make sure that folks got their meals. So, if trays were there and meal almost over, she would ask where is so and so?"

"She was nice but strict (just like a mom) which worked well around food with our population. She made them stick to diets so if they tried to trick her she was alert and on her feet about the trickery."

"She let us know consistently and nicely (I thought) about us forgetting to cancel meals when they ought to have been cancelled."

"She talks to people at their level and does not act like she is better than them."

"Ms. Celestine became part of the program meal routine and I think the guys are really going to miss her."

Please pass on our appreciation to Ms. Celestine for her good work. And thanks to you both for providing us with quality staff.

*– Keith Harris
Chief, Domiciliary Service*

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Livermore and the new Stockton facility for the outstanding services they have provided me. **Dr. Bautista** (Stockton) and **Tracy Smith** (Livermore) have been extremely helpful in diagnosing and treating my medical needs. Although I regard the trip to Livermore a bit of a chore, the audiology department schedules my appointments to avoid the heavy freeway traffic. I'm sure the patients that use the Stockton clinic are as pleaded as I am to have the new improved facility.

– A veteran

Amparo Khorana's dedication to the nutritional management of patients, particularly in ICU, and the thoughtful comments on ICU rounds had provided tremendous added value to the management of critically ill patients. When I go to national meetings, or even to Stanford to give lectures to intensivists, I mention your participation as a member of the multidisciplinary ICU Team at every opportunity. Most ICU's don't have a dedicated Dietician, and we are lucky to have you! I hope that you are already training a replacement ahead of your retirement. Thanks for all you do.

– Juiana Barr, M.D.

Because of the attention and care from **Belinda Fajardo, CNA**, my right foot has been saved. The POD Surgeon told me that I might lose two toes and maybe more. Belinda worked on me very diligently and two weeks later, the surgeon said there was nothing to do. Thank you Belinda!

– A veteran

Donna Riley, audiologist Menlo Park, is very knowledgeable about her profession and very professional in the way she explains required medical procedures. She even scheduled a hearing test during her lunch time so I'd have the results sooner. She's very considerate and we appreciate it.

– A veteran

Dr. Quentin Louie is an exceptional dentist, meticulous, thorough, extraordinarily professional and skilled. The absolutely best dental care I have ever had over 60 years, on three continents.

– A veteran



is published by and for
employees of the VA Palo Alto
Health Care System.

Submissions should be received by the 1st working day of the month to be included in upcoming issues. Due to space limitations, it is not possible to publish all submissions.

We welcome any comments, suggestions or story ideas you may have; please contact Kerri Childress (00K) at ext. 64888 or directly at 650-858-3925.

VA Palo Alto Health Care System

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